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**Respondent: Dave and Mary**

**Welcome to MedTech Chat, where we discover the latest healthcare tools, device technology, as well as research approaches. We’ll be talking to designers and insights professionals and other executives to better understand how med tech is helping patients and those caring for them now and in the future.**

**Today I’m very excited to be talking to Dave Norton and Mary Putnam from Stone Mantel. They have been working with me for several years now as we work on a thinktank called The Digital Healthcare Collaborative, which I’ll have them help me explain. Dave Norton is the founder of Stone Mantel and the founder of the collaboratives and has written a book on Context 2.0 and is what I would consider a thought leader in the consumer experience sector. Mary is a lead digital strategist for Stone Mantel. Before joining Stone Mantel, she led digital innovation and capability development for Hallmark. Recently she has been leading the digital healthcare collaborative and the members as they understand how patients could be better served by meaningful experiences. Thank you for joining me today.**

Thank you.

Thanks for having us, Tom. Appreciate it.

**One of the things that I think that you guys have been up to lately which is really fascinating and kind of actually blows my mind is thinking about how to bring meaningful experiences into the healthcare sector, and in particular, into med tech. I’m wondering if we could first start off by explaining how did we get here. Maybe you could give me a little bit of the background, Dave, on the Collaboratives and then maybe Mary, you could jump in and explain how then the Healthcare Collaborative adds onto that before we get into what is a meaningful experience.**

Absolutely. That’s a great question. Actually my very first client when I started Stone Mantel in 2005 wanted us to run for them what they called a collaborative, so we’ve been doing collaboratives for close to 14 years. That client, for nine years or seven years, decided to run their own program and then once they finished, we decided to create our own collaborative. Basically, what a collaborative is, or the way we define a collaborative is it’s a group of companies that get together, not just to talk about challenges that they face but to actually innovate and to work alongside each other and try to solve some of the future challenges that they need to address. Our particular focus is on experience strategy and design. Back in 2013, we started an initiative called the Digital Consumer Collaborative, which was focused on helping companies to understand what consumers wanted from digital experiences in the near future. It was actually through that program that I met Mary Putnam. Mary was the chief innovation person at Hallmark, did some great work there, and she had joined the collaborative. Within a few years of starting that program, we had a couple of healthcare companies reach out to us and say, “We would like to do this exact same thing but focused just on the healthcare industry.” So we looked around and sure enough, there was enough companies that were interested that we started the Digital Healthcare Collaborative. Its focus was on really helping to understand patient outcomes, patient needs, how technology could support the patient experience. It’s been a very, very successful program for us and for the companies that have participated. A few years ago we began to realize in the consumer work that we were doing that digital technology in and of itself wasn’t solving for some of them more foundational needs that consumers had, or at least the way we were thinking about digital technology didn’t solve for it. We stepped back and we looked at what consumers were trying to do in their lives, regardless of whether it was in healthcare or retail or finance, and we came to the conclusion that what they wanted more of was meaningful experiences. You could argue that in healthcare, there’s been a focus on meaningful experiences for a long time. Certainly the way that we talk about treating patients, the importance of treating patients, bedside manner, showing empathy, these are all elements of meaningful experiences. But we decided to go and ask consumers – patients – firsthand what they meant by “meaningful experiences,” and that led to a new approach and a focus for our current collaborative program on meaningful experiences that emphasizes what we might call life systems and the way that people balance life systems.

**Mary, can you then tell us more about how it developed into the Digital Healthcare Collaborative and the kind of work that we’re doing within that area?**

We had a couple companies come to Stone Mantel and wanted to use the approach that existed in the Digital Healthcare Collaborative to really look at how do we help companies think about their digital healthcare experiences. When we look at that, we’re trying to look at how do you leverage digital to improve patient outcomes and we’ll look at some large questions that we’re trying to answer. A lot of those were just around how do you help with behavior change, how do you help make the patient feel more empowered, how do you change the emergency room experience – there’s lots of different questions that people are trying to look at when they look at how to leverage digital. But we’ve been thinking more recently about, particularly as you think about the changes that happened this last year with COVID, how do you do meaningful remote delivery as a question, how you make digital experiences in healthcare feel smart – because a lot of them are frustrating to people – or even genius, and what do those look like? It does get down to some of the elements of what makes it meaningful for them. Is it time well-spent? Is it time well-saved? Because even time well-saved shows a respect for people. Do they hear and listen to my patient story? What kind of visualizations exist for me? There’s a lot of elements that we’ve been looking at. What does it mean to deliver solutions within healthcare that can really help improve patient outcomes?

**I wonder if you could help me better understand what we mean by “meaningful” and how does something become meaningful. I know part of it has to do with it being memorable, obviously, and I think some of it has to do with our reflection. But maybe you can help me better understand, what do we mean by that “meaningful experience”?**

I’ll let Dave answer a lot of this, but first of all is our definition of what even makes something meaningful. We define that as an experience that helps strengthen a person or their family, so it strengthens them and the people that they care about. It can be meaningful within a lot of different life systems that they have, or even how they try and balance the different parts of their life. And we’ve looked at different elements that can make experiences meaningful and created a toolkit against those. But Dave’s really been leading the charge around thinking about meaningful experiences for 20-plus years.

When I started studying meaningful experiences back in the early 2000s and I asked consumers what they thought was a meaningful experience, they would talk about things like there’s something associated with a cause. Certain brands that were tied to a particular cause were considered to be more meaningful that brands that didn’t have a cause. They would talk about principles. They would talk about authenticity – “I can’t have a meaningful experience in Las Vegas, but I can have a meaningful experience when I am reading a certain author that really knows his or her stuff.” So they would talk about principles like those types of things. And it seemed like at the time they were reacting to the “theming” of America, the over-commercialization of products and so forth. But interestingly, when we went back to consumers about four years ago and we asked them what makes for meaningful experiences, they began to describe something very different. They used the word “balance” all of the time. They would say things like, “It’s about the way that I’m able to find time to be with my kids and we can connect around a particular show, around a particular thing. Everything else in my life doesn’t fall apart because I’ve just done this particular piece.” They would talk about harmony, that there was a certain vibe that they got in their home or from their friends or from social media, and if they didn’t get that particular vibe, then they felt like they weren’t getting a meaningful experience. They would talk in systematic language, where they would describe, “I feel like I’m having a meaningful experience when everything is running well,” “When my household is in sync,” “When our calendars are aligned,” “When my body and my spirits and my mind are all aligned in some way shape or form.” And that was especially true this last year with everything that was going on with COVID, the importance of staying balanced, the importance of being present and being connected. Those are the types of things that they described as leading to meaningful experiences. And all of those things are very different from what we tend to think about. Let’s back up a little bit. Historically, companies have always thought that if they could make their experiences memorable, that would be fantastic. People would remember it and that would lead to them returning and working with them again. It would make them more satisfied, they’d have better patient outcomes from a healthcare perspective. Consumers and patients are onto that with companies. They know what you’re asking when you ask, “Was it a memorable experience?” For them it’s oftentimes another way of just saying were they satisfied with the product. A meaningful experience is measured in terms of whether or not you reflected positively on your life because of the experience. It’s a totally different approach, and oftentimes you don’t know if it’s meaningful until days, weeks or months later, and then you realize, “You know what, that was really meaningful to me what they did.” And people want more meaningful experiences in their lives but it’s a much higher benchmark. I think about when you’re going through the process of getting an elective piece of surgery, the patient doesn’t necessarily – they may be satisfied with the process that they went through, but it could take months before they realize that, “Wow, I really appreciate what the surgeons did for me, what the staff did for me, what the hospital did for me.” It’s at that point that then it becomes a meaningful experience.

**It’s funny because it reminds me of, I know that you have this approach that you use, the jobs framework, and I always think of -- that job of aspiration I always think of as the top and I know that you’ve been talking about a larger version of that. But it’s almost like if I have a transformation from one stage of my life to another that that then makes a meaningful experience. I feel like I’m mixing metaphors, but I’m wondering if either of you can talk me through it in almost like a story format, like when we think of the person comes into the story and then they go through an adventure and then they’ve been transformed by that adventure.**

You ask a really interesting and challenging question – is a meaningful experience the same as a transformative experience? And it might be a Venn diagram. There might be times when there’s overlap, but there might be some times when it’s different. Let’s talk about what’s similar and then talk about what’s different. What’s similar is the feeling that you get from the experience that that was significant, that was important, I need to remember that particular thing, I was moved by it in a way that really, really mattered to me. What’s different is that a transformative experience changes you from one state to another. That’s really what it means. In healthcare oftentimes that’s what we’re doing. We take people who are sick and we make them well. That’s a transformative experience. There may be some times when you transform them and it’s not really meaningful to them but they did actually move from being sick to being well. I always think about meaningful experiences as being kind of a half step down from a truly transformative experience. The transformative experiences are all about this journey that you go on, the diagnostic that tells you how well you’re doing and the feeling at the end or the change that has occurred in your life, and they’re really measured by pre/post types of things. A meaningful experience could be a transformative experience but a meaningful experience doesn’t have to be. It could be just about, “I enjoyed that walk through the park. It was not a big deal but I was with my daughter and I really felt like we connected and because we connected, I feel better about myself and she feels better,” and that’s it. That’s all there was to it. That was the meaningfulness of it. Does that make sense?

**Yes. I guess the bar is almost too high to set to say it has to be transformational to be meaningful.**

Every single time, yes.

**But it doesn’t sound like it has to be meaningful to be transformational.**

No, not always. There’s certainly overlap. Go ahead Mary.

I think Tom, if you look at some of those things that we’ve heard people talk about this last year, of things that are really meaningful to them, they’ve given examples like the walk through the park, but we hear that, “I’m taking time and walking with my wife. We’re having conversations we haven’t had before,” “I’m enjoying and seeing nature because I can’t get out and travel to other places but I’m appreciating the beauty around me.” And those are things that are really meaningful to people that they talk about. Or simple things like somebody paid for – we’re seeing a lot of random acts of kindness, “Somebody paid for my coffee ahead of me in line,” happening as people are looking at how do they spread some positivity within everything that we’ve seen happen with COVID this last year and just all the events of 2020. And those are all things that are meaningful to people, but they’re not transformational.

**Why is it important for us to be thinking about this? I know in a consumer setting it’s important to get one engaged into the brand and to come back and to really enjoy that experience and want more of that. But I’m wondering, in a healthcare setting, where we’re so often thinking about, “Is it safe and effective? Does it meet the bar of the functional things we have to do? Did we get FDA approval? Is it covered,” et cetera, et cetera. Why is meaningful important in a healthcare setting?**

I think in many ways, and Dave you may agree or disagree with me, but I think meaningful is even more important in the healthcare setting. I know that healthcare feels like they’re so far behind consumer and you need to get to a good experience and the bar is too high for a meaningful experience, but there’s so much about navigating healthcare that is hard for patients and individuals and that sense of, “People care about my time,” “They understand me,” “They understand my goals,” helps people engage with their healthcare experience a lot more. It helps with motivating for behavior change. If we look at what are all the social determinants of health and how do we get to improving patient outcomes of scale. I think looking at those elements of meaning and how do you bring some positivity, it helps not just with the patient, but it can help with the healthcare provider experience as well.

I totally agree with what you’re saying, Mary. What our research suggests is that the mechanism behind meaningful experiences is actually more nuanced and sophisticated than just the walk in the park example might pretend. Companies need to be thinking systematically about people’s lives, and when they think systematically and then they do things that fit within people’s life systems, that they’re much more likely to create those meaningful experiences for them. And I’ll just give you a really simple, straightforward reason why healthcare companies need to be focused on meaningful experiences – you start building these healthcare apps, these technologies that you want to help support your patient experience, and they don’t fit into people’s lives, they don’t help them to create balance, they don’t make them feel like they’re actually accomplishing what they’re trying to accomplish -- and they abandon your technology. It’s not enough just to create less friction in people’s lives; you have to find ways to support them, strengthen them in a way that really matters to them. That’s really what the mantra is. We can use these examples of walking through the park as meaningful. That’s great, but there’s actually a lot more that’s going on in people’s lives that make that walk through the park significant. Does that make sense?

**Totally. As you’re talking though, I’m thinking to me myself in typical research that involves a patient-facing situation, that we would think about how that person, that user would want things and try to design for them. But interestingly, I always find that if it’s not as clear that the patient is involved in, say the advertisement, the direct-to-consumer, that it then becomes focused on the physician because it’s the physician’s choice or it’s more about what the physician recommends and somehow that patient gets lost in the discussion. I’m wondering, should we be thinking about meaningful for the patient? Should we be thinking also about meaningful for the healthcare provider? What should the focus be?**

I think you have to look at both. When we think about it on the consumer side, it’s about what’s that employee experience and what is the customer experience and it’s how those two work together and how they’re both meaningful that make for really meaningful experiences. And I think the same is true in healthcare, that how you think about the healthcare provider experience or on the payer side, the payer experience, and how those really deliver against the jobs that the patient is trying to get done and the understanding of what makes for a really great meaningful experience. I think you have to look at all of it.

**I know one of the things that we’ve been talking about are systems and we haven’t really gotten into that aspect of it. But it’s interesting that healthcare really has an overlap in areas of our lives, including our health, our finances, our family, maybe even our professions, so I’m wondering, is there anything we need to think about in terms of a system when it comes to delivering meaningful experiences in healthcare?**

We certainly do. I think healthcare has been very interested in here recently in social determinants of wellbeing. What we’re talking about in terms of systemic thinking about meaningful experiences connects very nicely with this idea of social determinants. The idea that if you live in a part of the country where it’s very difficult to get to good food resources or it’s very difficult to live safely and if that impacts your health it’s very much connected to this idea of systemic meaningful experiences.

**One of the things I’ve been learning from you guys is they’re all different ways to tap into these experiences and I know you have these toolkits. I didn’t know if there was anything in particular you wanted to share. Obviously, we can’t talk about all of the tools in the tool chest, but is there anything that our listeners could think about in terms of if they’re trying to make something meaningful in healthcare, what kinds of tools might they use?**

I think one of the tools that’s particularly important is positive self-talk. How do you help people have good conversations about themselves and give them the belief that they can do things? And I think healthcare has done that well in some places and not as well in others. Part of it starts with understanding what is it that really matters to the patient and what they’re trying to get done and their goals and using that data to help with that positive self-talk.

**It’s interesting you bring that one up because it’s funny how you go down two tracks – you either get wrapped up in negative self-talk or you get wrapped up in positive self-talk and I’m wondering how you can tip someone who’s going down one path to the other.**

One of the most effective ways to tip them one way or the other is to make them aware of the fact that they’re actually engaged in self-talk and you can do that very simply by saying something like, “Did you have a positive thought about yourself today and can you describe that for me?” By asking that kind of a question you’re getting them to think about their self-talk. We’ve found that with consumers you can actually use the term “self-talk.” With a little bit of explanation, they get what you’re talking about.

**What’s interesting about that is it automatically then gets me into a reflection mode. You’ve asked me and now I have to think about it and now I’m reflecting on my negative self-talk and how that’s affecting me. That’s an interesting play on how do you get someone to reflect. Are there any other ways to get people to reflect on their experience?**

There’s lots of different ways that people reflect on their experiences today and a lot of them, there are some digital tools out there and I’d love to say that digital is the way to do it, but the digital tools aren’t as effective as even great visualizations that people create on paper, the reminders, the notes they have for themselves, the time they set aside to plan and review their goals. Those things tend to work better for people than the digital tools do today.

**Of course that reminds me of the article we put together on what does stupid, smart, dumb and genius look like in healthcare tools. Trying to avoid a tool which should be able to serve up data in a meaningful way to help someone accomplish something but then ends up doing the wrong things and making it frustrating, thereby making it stupid. What does it look like to be genius in helping someone have a meaningful healthcare experience?**

Mary, do you want to go first?

It’s interesting because I can think about what makes for a great genius experience in healthcare but what we haven’t done is really overlay that because we haven’t studied meaning as much in healthcare of what makes for a really meaningful experience of this genius in healthcare. I suspect there’s a thing, but we just haven’t thought enough about that yet. But one of the things that makes for a really genius experience in healthcare is you can help predict the problems that I’m going to have and you can help me reach my goals better, anticipate things for me. It all gets down to are you leveraging data in a way that’s really about what’s important for me and helping me achieve the outcomes I want. But Dave, I’d love your thoughts on what makes for genius meaningful experiences in healthcare.

When we ask patients about genius experiences we learned very quickly that we can’t ask them to describe a genius experience because they don’t know exactly what that means. It’s a little bit nebulous. If we ask them to think about a superpower that they wish that they had related to healthcare, related to technology, related to their lives, so we take those three buckets and we say, “I want you to think about your life, I want you to think about healthcare and I want you to think about technology. What superpower would you like to have?” Then all of the sudden, they can talk to us about things that would require genius technology, frankly. One of my favorite examples of that is you think about somebody who’s nearsighted or farsighted, and they have these glasses that they wear to correct their vision. Glasses in and of themselves, they’re not smart technology. They do their job but that’s all they do. And I guess you could add sensors to the glasses and make those glasses a little bit better at adjusting for night vision or adjusting for cloudy days or for reading, so that the sensor kind of helps the user. That would be a smart experience to create. But when you ask a consumer, “What is a superpower that’s associated with your eyes,” the nearsighted person and the farsighted person both are going to say, “I’d love a pair of glasses that actually gives me power to see things that I couldn’t otherwise see.” Maybe I’m able to see up the side of a mountain, long distances or maybe I’m able to read through walls or something along that line, crazy stuff like that. All of the sudden, they begin to think about their impairment, their chronic condition as being the source or the basis for having some kind of a truly powerful technology in their life. I think that healthcare is just on the cusp of beginning to understand that in the future, patients are not just going to want you to fix the broken problem. They’re going to want you to help them to have superpowers to accomplish far more. If you can’t hear very well, maybe the technology should go well beyond helping you to just hear better and give you some sort of a superpower.

**So you go from having an issue that you need solving to actually doing even better and having a superpower in that space. That’s amazing.**

Absolutely.

**As brands, as people in solution-provider space, med tech, as they’re thinking about the products that they’re creating for their end users, where should they be focusing if they want to think about meaningful experiences, if they want to think about genius, where should they start and what’s the best way for them to engage with you guys in order to get there?**

I think one of the places to start, and it’s a framework you mentioned before, is first of all, what’s the key job that they’re trying to get done? What does the patient really want to do and then how do you deliver in a smart or genius way that’s meaningful? And so it’s that question you asked around how you bring that together. And I think one way to engage with us to do that is the collaborative and another way is we work with clients to accelerate what they’re doing or to help them innovate against delivering better experiences for their customers, for the patients.

I totally agree that usually the starting point is to really identify what is it that the patient is willing to hire you to do. And then from there, we can build different types of experiences. They may be simple, functional experiences and that’s a great starting point. They may lead to something that’s more meaningful or even become transformative, depending on what you’re trying to accomplish and how you’re going about it.

**Such an important point because so many folks working on med tech are thinking about the functions. What’s the next attribute? What should I tweak about the design that I have? But they’re not focused on the end user and what are they trying to accomplish. And it might be just beyond the functional aspect. It might be, as you say, emotional, social, et cetera. So that’s really powerful even to just think.**

I think in the world we live today, if all you’re doing is focusing on the functional need, there’s probably 13 start-ups that are working on the exact same problem and you’re going to have a hard time differentiating yourselves. You really need to up your game if you really want to differentiate yourselves in the marketplace.

**I know there’s a couple ways that they can connect with you and I’m happy to post those on the site. Obviously, they can go to your website or to your LinkedIn and I know there’s different avenues of working with you, as Mary mentioned, they could be one of the collaborative members and actually get involved in a year-long research endeavor or they can work with you personally on a custom project. Is there anything in particular that we can tell the listeners?**

If a company is particularly interested in one of the topics that we’ve covered and would like to go a little deeper, we would be happy to share some of the research that we’ve done with them, either through some sort of Zoom 20-minute session. That’s a great way to be introduced to all of these concepts.

**That’s a great idea because I know you’ve done some boot camps as people are entering the collaborative and there’s so many great topics you can go deep on, so I guess that would be a great suggestion, is for them to find a topic of interest and connect with you on that topic. I’ll make sure to list both the website for the collaborative as well as for Stone Mantel and a couple other useful links. But thank you guys so much for doing this. I know that this is sort of an area that’s newer and that I feel like thought leaders like yourselves are working on is really to figure out how can we bring meaningful experiences to the digital healthcare space, so I really appreciate you guys doing this.**

No problem. Tom, thank you. One other thing you may mention as a resource is Dave started doing some conversations on Clubhouse, so that’s another way to connect with us is to follow Dave on Clubhouse and join some of those conversations.

**That’s a great idea and I can actually list your handle there, so anybody who has a Clubhouse membership can find Dave and I on there as well trying to have conversations with people about these topics.**

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